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Research Memorandum
RSB 3.18, January 17, 1962

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS
January 11-17

DEVELOPMENTS OF THE WEEK

Negotiations. The second Thompson-Gromyko conversation on January 12 introduced no substantive change of importance in the Soviet negotiating position on Berlin and Germany. [As was the case with the first conversation, however, the Soviet Foreign Minister indicated the USSR expected the discussions to continue.] No mention of the talks has as yet appeared in the Soviet press and bloc commentaries have been relatively few.

Soviet and bloc media, particularly those of the GDR, continued to exploit the December 27 Soviet memorandum to the FRG, stressing the advantages to the FRG of closer ties with the Soviet Union, with special emphasis on the economic advantages of such ties. The West German communist party added the note that trade relations with the bloc could counteract the disadvantages West Germany would suffer in the Common Market.

The reference to a peace treaty in 1962 reportedly made by GDR Volkskammer President Dieckman in a speech January 9 did not appear in the summaries of the speech published in the GDR press.

There have been some recent hints that Moscow may be seeking some improvement in the international atmosphere. Khrushchev is reported to be hinting for an invitation to visit Italy. Gromyko apparently surprised the Greek ambassador to Moscow at a recent meeting with friendly overtures and hopes for improved relations between the two countries. The friendly tone was in marked contrast to the tenor of the recent series of Soviet demarches and notes to Greece protesting NATO missile installations in the country. Soviet officers in Berlin were demonstratively friendly in offering to assist US military personnel in East Berlin whose car had broken down. The GDR suddenly released, in an "act of mercy," American citizens Ferry and Pankay, jailed in East Berlin since last September. The Soviet Embassy in East Berlin is also reportedly continuing its efforts to cultivate social contact with West German and West Berlin journalist circles.

Military Preparations and Demonstrations. No changes in the Soviet and bloc military posture relating to Germany were reported during the past week.

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APPEALS REVIEW PANEL, DATE 1/17/90

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GDR Minister of Defense Hoffmann's January 12 assertion that East German workers had allegedly been calling for universal conscription was not contained in the summaries of his speech published throughout East Germany. Only Neues Deutschland printed the passage in question.

For the first time in about a month, East German security officials stopped and damaged a vehicle of the US Potsdam military mission and manhandled one of the occupants. US protests to the Soviets elicited the most categorical and complete apology received from the Soviets in recent years.

bloc reporting on the "Long Thrust" exercise has been extensive but relatively restrained. Editorial comment in general has referred to the "tension heightening" aspects of the exercise in a comparatively routine fashion.

Berlin and Germany. No changes in the access procedure to and within Berlin developed during the week. Construction was begun on several small buildings at three of the Berlin sector crossing points but no official explanation of their intended function was forthcoming.

Both the Soviet and GDR media continue to charge that the presence of NATO parliamentarians and FRG Bundestag members in West Berlin constitutes an act of aggression but threatened no counteraction.

Internal dissatisfaction and unrest within East Germany continues to be extensive and no immediate improvement in the economic situation appears likely. There are some indications the regime may now be under pressure from the USSR to move more cautiously and placate the population.

A communique issued by the GDR Council of State January 15 implied that GDR diplomatic overtures to Finland, Ceylon and the UAR had met with a certain amount of success. The communique stressed the prospects of military neutrality in Germany and the link between the views of the neutral states and the GDR's own policy line.

ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET INTENTIONS

Gromyko's exposition of the Soviet position in his second talk with Thompson was an elaboration of Moscow's "sub-maximum" negotiating position unveiled last September. In general, the Soviet performance was more or less what was to be expected at this stage of the talks, with Gromyko continuing to probe the firmness of the Western position while himself appearing unyielding. It seemed evident, however, that the USSR was interested in having the talks continue. b1a3

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Bloc exploitation of the Soviet memorandum to Bonn appears to be a concerted effort to woo various influential elements within the FRG not necessarily to a pro-Soviet view but to a position less firmly committed to the West. The memorandum is evidently a companion piece to the note on General Heusinger which aimed at fostering suspicion of the FRG within the Western alliance. There is also probably a link between the GDR's renewed diplomatic efforts among the uncommitted states and the Soviet memorandum, since in both, the FRG Hallstein doctrine plays a role. Closer ties between the FRG and the bloc would tend to undercut the Hallstein doctrine, still the major obstacle to the GDR's efforts to gain diplomatic recognition outside the bloc.

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Special Supplement to RM RSB 3.18, January 17, 1962:

Analysis of Thompson-Gromyko Talk, January 12

Gromyko's major effort in his January 12 talk with Ambassador Thompson was to elaborate and table formally the USSR's now-standard "sub-maximum" proposals for an agreement on a West Berlin "free city" and other issues (German borders, nuclear weapons, "respect for GDR sovereignty," and NATO - Warsaw Pact treaty). Also, Gromyko in effect dismissed or disputed all major points raised by the US in the previous discussion.

At the same time, Gromyko indicated the USSR's desire to have the discussions continue. He stated the USSR regarded the conversations as a continuation of the whole series of talks preceding them and found in the series "certain indications" that an agreement on Berlin was possible. He repeated his earlier remark that it should be possible to work out an agreement on access which "did not prejudice the GDR's sovereignty" and commented that Thompson's impression of the second meeting as a "step backward" may prove to be a "hasty" verdict. b1c3

Gromyko's elaboration of the issues he had declined to specify January 2 proved to be little more than a repetition of earlier formulations. Several other aspects of the exchange are of special interest, however. Gromyko's emphatic reaction to the plebescite proposal revealed not only a sensitivity to the Soviet vulnerability there but also produced an indirect reaffirmation of ultimate Soviet responsibility in Berlin and Germany. ("The Germans were not asked when the troops entered and they will not be asked when they leave.")

Gromyko's complete lack of reaction to Thompson's statement that only an Allied suspension of an article of the West German constitution kept Berlin out of the FRG and FRG troops out of Berlin was also interesting. Gromyko was evidently unprepared for the point (it being hardly likely the USSR would have no objections) and will probably refer to it in a later session.

Soviet treatment of the proposed international access authority still remained ambiguous. Gromyko's argumentation did not reject the idea per se but rather rejected "any agreement which would damage the sovereignty of the GDR."

In general, Gromyko's performance at the second talk appears to represent neither a hardening nor a softening of the Soviet position; on the whole, it was remarkably consistent with traditional Soviet tactics in such negotiations. It was evident the Soviets were interested in continuing the exchange and were probing the depth and firmness of the Western position with that in mind.

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[This conjecture is borne out not only by Gromyko's statements but by the fact the Soviet side tabled two papers which were almost certainly expected to provoke counterproposals. Also, Gromyko mentioned no deadlines, made no attempts to hurry or retard the pace of the talks and conveyed, deliberately or otherwise, the impression that considerable elasticity existed with respect to possible forms and content of any arrangement to be achieved on Berlin.]

b1a2
b1a5

No conclusive evidence emerged as to the precise tactics the Soviets are likely to pursue in further talks; they still have leeway for a move in any one of several directions. In any event, the Soviets give no indication of being committed to a course which poses a peace treaty as the only alternative to the Berlin arrangement they are now proposing. For the time being at least, they appear desirous of probing the possibility of agreement with the West over Berlin without a rigid timetable. Nor have they restricted their ability to prolong the talks indefinitely if they so desire. It may well be that the USSR is as yet undecided as to its own future policy line in Berlin and will await development of the talks before coming to any conclusions.

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